

Example of the burning bed book review

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



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Faith McNulty was the author of the book, *The Burning Bed*. *The Burning bed* was a non-fiction book that tackled family problems and at some point, the possible consequences of an unresolved husband and wife conflicts. This book later on was adapted to a film. The film won several awards and nominations because of the boldness of the story which revolves around the story of Francine, a battered wife.

The Burning Bed is a non-fiction book which represented the life of Francine Hughes. She was basically subjected to a great deal of violence from her husband. It was a book that staged how human rights are often violated by their spouses. The story actually revolved around Hughes, a battered and an abused woman, and her children's life.

One night after suffering from a good beating and being raped by her husband, she finally made up her mind. She started her plan by having her children stay inside the car located a few meters away from their house. She specifically instructed her children to wear their jackets and to stay inside the car no matter what happens. She then went on to fulfill her plans. She poured gasoline around his husband's bed and lit it on fire while he was

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sleeping, burning the room and later on, the whole house down. Right after the fire spread out like gas, Hughes immediately went out to check out on her kids to see if they were alright.

A few moments later, she went to a police station to confess her crime. She was charged with murder. Since she does not have her own lawyer, the court appointed one for her but the appointed lawyer almost always finds her in an unresponsive and dazed state. The appointed attorney however managed to convince her to cooperate and tell her story so that they will be able to formulate a good criminal defense strategy to the court.

She then told the lawyer her story from the very beginning way back in 1960s when she met her husband, Mickey Hughes. She mentioned how volatile he was back then and how she fell in love with that man although she kind of felt that time how his bullying personality could affect their relationship later on. But still, she followed her heart, they got married and after a few years, they realized that they already have two daughters and a son named Christy, Nicole and Jimmy.

Even before their first child was born, Francine had already been terrified the way how her husband treats her. There had been several cases wherein her husband abuses her. So, she filed for a divorce and fortunately, she gained custody of their three children. Despite being pressured by Mickey's parents and even her own mother to remarry Mickey, she refused to do so. Nevertheless, Mickey still considers Francine as his wife.

There came a point when Mickey got custody over their three children. Unfortunately for Francine, she still could not get the favor of the several

social agencies that she contacted to seek help from. So, she realized that she has to go back and stay inside the Hughes' house if she does not want to be separated from their children. As expected, Francine once again became a battered housewife but the things that Mickey does seemed to be worse than before.

And then one night, after being raped by Mickey, Francine decided to burn Mickey's bed and the Hughes' house down, taking Mickey down with it. As the lawyer thinks about a nice defense strategy for Francine, he knew that there are no loopholes that the law could provide for battered women no matter how abused they are. So, they could not use reasons such as self-defense to justify Francine's actions. Instead, he decided to take a risky move; to tell the court and make everyone believe that Francine was insane by the time she did the crime.

Mickey's parents served as witnesses for Francine's prosecution and both of them insisted that they never saw any incidence or signs of abuse whenever they visit Mickey and her wife. The turning point here was when Christy, Francine's eldest testified how their father abuses their mother. After Christy's testimony, Francine finally wins the case.

Theories

One theory that could be applied to the book is the theory about battered women's syndrome. There are actually even more theories that focuses on the effects of abuse on the psychological and cognitive state of a woman or any particular individual. However, the problem is that only a few of such theories are accepted and recognized. Generally, a theory that revolves

around this topic each has its own point and basis. However, most of such theories fail to consider the current norms of society. It is given that local and non-government organizations related to violence and abuse will be the major proponents of such theories. However, that does not mean that their ideas and suggestions about the right and wrong things to be done to an abused woman will be immediately followed and believed in by other organizations regardless whether they are related to violence and abuse or not. Gender and women violence is a very common case and there is this disorder that they call Battered Women's Syndrome (BWS). Battered women could not only receive physical traumas whenever they are being abused or whenever something is being done that are against their will. BWS claims that women could also be emotionally and psychologically traumatized and therefore could not be held responsible if ever they will commit some violent actions. If applied to Francine's case in *The Burning Bed*, she simply could not be held liable for murdering her husband while he is sleeping.

If that scenario in "The Burning Bed" is to be further analyzed, it would seem that Francine just tried to respond to an external stimuli—her husband's abuse. It could also be assumed that he responded so violently and brutally in because she wants to protect their children from her husband. This is another characteristic of BWS that most available laws about women and children abuse have failed to consider. So far, the main thing that concerns Francine is her and her children's safety. There are two other general characteristics of BWS but they were not well portrayed in the book. In terms of legality, some court may be able to consider BWS as a subcategory of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder wherein the killer is regarded

as insane or mentally challenged at the time she committed the crime. This could again be true if used as a pattern in analyzing the story. Experiencing violence, especially for a long time, could result to mental traumas and may cause an individual's way of thinking to crumble.

Aside from BWS, another theory that could be associated with the story is the theory about murder by insanity. In cases when a defendant could not file a valid defense statement or strategy to the court, his lawyer may use a murder by insanity as their last resort. This is often seen in court trials. Other last resort options that a criminal defense lawyer may also include drug addiction because it can also, in some way, affect an individual's way of thinking and cause him to do involuntary and violent actions such as murder.

Most state courts accept insanity and other psychological issues as an excuse for felony crimes such as murder and rape. John Hogan's case (Atkins, 2008) is probably a good example. During a family vacation, he attempted to murder his son and daughter by throwing them on the balcony of their apartment. He also tried to kill himself by jumping from the same building. After the incident, his son died and Hogan and his daughter survived. The judge said that Hogan was incapable of murdering his son and daughter and that he cannot be held responsible for the incident because of his state of mind. Hogan was then cleared of murder (Atkins, 2008) and was ordered to undergo psychological tests. It was quite similar to Francine's case only that she killed her husband. However, based on the example used, it could be asserted that Francine and her lawyer could also use murder by insanity as an excuse for her to be cleared of murder and other charges

related to the incident. Francine may also be able to regain custody over her children since her husband is already dead and no one is left to take care of their children aside from her. She may however take into consideration the option of passing her custody over their children in case her plea for murder by insanity gets rejected by the court. If further analyzed, it really seems that Francine has been traumatized by the way how her husband treated and treats her and her children. At the very least, she should stand a chance in her fight for freedom but in case she wins, she still has to undergo psychological tests and even stay at a rehabilitation center just like what happened to Hogan who killed his son and attempted to kill his daughter.

Discussion

The book discussed one of the oldest and most common types of abuse present in history; gender abuse. Even in ancient times (Greek mythology books readers know about this); gender abuse had already been common. After reading the book and watching the film adaptation, I only realized that what Francine did to her husband was not reasonable. This is so far one of the aspects about the book worthy to be discussed.

Mickey never intended to take her life nor her children's life and kill them. He was simply abusive and according to Francine during her story telling session with her lawyer, " Mickey has a bullying personality". So, she should have expected the consequences of marrying such man. Killing a man for abuse is and shall never be a reasonable action. She should have tried to report her experiences as a wife to the authorities first. She should have called the police first before she resorted to killing.

Yes, it was evident how traumatized she had become but killing is just a

mortal sin just like how the bible tells about it so, it should never be an option. Having their three children witness the burning of the house is also not a wise decision and is actually not so realistic. Having a child witness their house being burned while their father is sleeping inside could induce emotional and psychological trauma. Considering the age of Francine's children, the previous statement could be very feasible.

Spousal abuse is definitely a type of case that needs more of the authorities' attention. Without giving proper attention to such cases, more deaths and scenarios similar to the ones in *Burning Bed* might occur. Using violence as an answer to another case of violence just sparks up the fire even more. The worst thing about this is the fact that innocent children's minds could also be affected and this is what actually happens most of the time.

Conclusion

The book basically presented a lot of learning and realizations about the current state of our society. No matter how we insist that we are not living in a patriarchal society anymore, that's not simply evident in the case of Francine. She tried to fight for her rights by seeking support from social institutions but didn't get an answer, additionally, this happened in real life as it is a non-fiction book.

So, it could happen to any women we know; to your sister or even to your own mother. This book could serve as an eye opener for the public that women are still being abused and that violence could not end another case of violence. I would this book to my friends and other people so that their

minds could be opened as well. However, I really couldn't recommend this book for young audiences because of the adult terms present.

Works Cited

McNulty, F. *The Burning Bed*. US: Harcourt, 1980.

Atkins, R. *Is insanity an excuse for murder*. UK, 2008.